

IN THE CLAIMS:

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

Please AMEND claims 1, 3-10 and 15-24 in accordance with the following:

1. (currently amended) A character string recognition apparatus, comprising:
 - a key character code extraction unit automatically extracting a code string of a key word which is a node of a character string from a character string category to be recognized and expressed as a character code;
 - a key word extraction unit separating an image of the character string into images of individual characters, recognizing the individual character images and extracting a-as key word ~~extracted by said key characters, a string of characters corresponding to the code~~ string of the key word;
 - a partial area extraction unit ~~or extracting a partial area falling between extracted~~ of the key words is extracted from a-the image of the character string image; and
 - a recognition unit holistically recognizing a character strings-string in the partial areas determined by the extracted key words by said partial area extraction unit.
2. (original) The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a verification unit verifying a recognition result of the holistic recognition by said recognition unit.
3. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when ~~a-the~~ key word is extracted from ~~a-the image of the~~ character string image, ~~and when but~~ only a-part of a key character forming the key word is extracted, an extraction condition ~~as-a~~ of the key character for preceding and subsequent characters is mitigated, and ~~a-the key~~ character is re-extracted.
4. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein ~~when a-during~~ extraction of the key word is extracted from a-the image of the character string image, ~~and when a partial character string, including leading and trailing characters in the characters in-of~~ the key word~~[[,]]~~ and more than a predetermined ~~ratio~~ percentage of the characters forming the key

word, is ~~are~~ extracted, said key word extraction unit regards a ~~the~~ partial character string as a the key word.

5. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein ~~when a~~ during extraction of the key word ~~is extracted from a~~ the image of the character string ~~image~~, when a partial character string includes at least two or more separate characters ~~are extracted in the~~ key characters ~~forming the key word~~, and ~~when~~ more than a predetermined ratio ~~percentage~~ of the characters in the key word are in an area enclosed by the ~~extracted~~ separate characters, said key word extraction unit extracts the partial character string as a ~~partial character string portion~~ of the key word.

6. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when a key word is extracted from a the image of the character string ~~image~~, said key word extraction unit performs a holistic recognizing process on an extracted key word or a partial key word, and verifies probability as a word.

7. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when a key word is extracted from a the image of the character string ~~image~~, said key word extraction unit compares an area segmented as one character in character feature and word feature, and extracts a the string of characters ~~string~~ forming at least part of a ~~key word or the~~ key word.

8. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when a word is extracted using word feature of a the key word from a the image of the character string ~~image~~, said key word extraction unit enhances recognition precision in word recognition by referring to a dictionary in which a word easily misrecognized as a the key word is entered as a similar word.

9. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when a the code string of a the key word which is a the node of a the character string is extracted from a the character string category, said key character code extraction unit extracts at least one of a first character having a large ~~first~~ predetermined number of occurrences ~~in entire~~ among a first set of character strings to be recognized, a second character having a large ~~second~~ predetermined number of occurrences in a character string unit, and/or a second set of closely associated characters as the key words.

10. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein [[A]] an identifiable character which is not easily misrecognized is entered in advance, and said key character code extraction unit extracts the entered-identifiable character as a key character when a-the code string of a-the key word as-a-is the node of a-the character string from a character string category.

11. (original) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when a word area is holistically recognized, said recognition unit performs a word recognizing process, segments a character for the area, and recognizes the character so that a word recognition result can be determined when a character contained in the word recognition result is contained as n higher order and has a number of occurrences equal to or larger than a threshold in the character recognition result.

12. (original) The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein:

said recognition unit holistically recognizes a word area based on a word feature generated by combining character features;

said verification unit computes a division position of each character in a word image from a matching template, compares line density of a word image obtained at each division position with line density held by each character of a recognized word, and rejects a word recognition result when a sum of the line density, or a difference in a collation ratio is larger than a threshold.

13. (original) The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein:

said recognition unit holistically recognizes a word area based on a word feature generated by combining character features;

said verification unit computes a division position of each character in a word image from a matching template, compares peripheral distribution of a word image obtained at each division position with peripheral distribution held by each character of a recognized word, and rejects a word recognition result when a sum of the peripheral distribution, or a difference in a collation ratio is larger than a threshold.

14. (original) The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein:

said recognition unit holistically recognizes a word area based on a word feature generated by combining character features;

said verification unit compares a number of characters in a recognized word is compared with a number of characters estimated from a word image, and rejects a word recognition result when a difference in the number of characters is larger than a threshold.

15. (currently amended) A character string recognition apparatus, comprising:

key character code extraction means for automatically extracting a code string of a key word which is a node of a character string from a character string category to be recognized and expressed as a character code;

key word extraction means for separating an image of the character string into images of individual characters, recognizing the individual character images and extracting a-as key word extracted by said key characters, a string of characters corresponding to the code string of the key word;

a partial area extraction means for extracting a partial area falling between extracted of the key words is extracted from a-the image of the character string image; and

recognition means for holistically recognizing a character strings-string in the partial areas-determined-by-the extracted-key-words by said partial area extraction unit.

16. (currently amended) A character string recognition apparatus, comprising:

a recognition target character string group storage unit storing a list of character strings in a category to be recognized;~~and~~

a key word determination unit searching said recognition target character string group storage unit for each character to obtain a number of occurrences of each character, defining a character having a large number of occurrences as a key character, and defining a character string having a large number of occurrences as a key word; and

a key word extraction unit separating an image of a character string into images of individual characters, recognizing the individual character images in the character string and extracting as key word characters, a string of characters corresponding to the code string of the key word.

17. (currently amended) A character string recognition apparatus, comprising:

a key character/word storage unit storing a determined key character or key word; and

a key character/word extraction unit separating an image of the character string into images of individual characters, recognizing the individual character images and extracting a character string as a key word if a part of the character string in the key word is extracted when a

key character or a key word stored in said key character/word storage unit is extracted from [[a]]
the image of the character string to be recognized.

18. (currently amended) A character string recognition apparatus, comprising:
a word recognition unit recognizing individual character images in an image of a character string to identify a word; and
a verification unit checking whether or not a recognition result of said word recognition unit is correct.

19. (currently amended) The apparatus according to claim 18, wherein said verification unit verifies a recognition result based on line density or peripheral distribution.

20. (currently amended) A key word determining method, comprising: ~~the step of~~
obtaining a number of occurrences of each character in a list stored in advance based on the list of character strings in a category to be recognized, defining a character having a large number of occurrences as a key character, and defining a character string having a large number of occurrences as a key word; and
recognizing individual character images in an image of a character string to identify at least one word.

21. (currently amended) A character string recognizing method, comprising ~~the steps of~~:
obtaining a number of occurrences of each character in a list stored in advance based on the list of character strings in a category to be recognized, defining a character having a large number of occurrences as a key character, and defining a character string having a large number of occurrences as a key word;
extracting the key character or the key word from a character string image to be recognized; and
recognizing individual character images in an image of a character string to identify a word for each area delimited by each key character or key word in the character string image to be recognized.

22. (currently amended) A computer-readable storage medium storing a program used to direct a computer to ~~realize the functions~~ perform a method comprising

obtaining a number of occurrences of each character in a list stored in advance based on the list of character strings in a category to be recognized, defining a character having a large number of occurrences as a key character, and defining a character string having a large number of occurrences as a key word; and

recognizing individual character images in an image of a character string to identify at least one word.

23. (currently amended) A computer data signal embodied in a carrier wave and representing a program that ~~makes-causes~~ a computer to control interchanging data concerning a process included in a series of process flows with an external device, ~~and the program making the computer execute the steps of the process comprising:~~

obtaining a number of occurrences of each character in a list stored in advance based on the list of character strings in a category to be recognized, defining a character having a large number of occurrences as a key character, and defining a character string having a large number of occurrences as a key word;

extracting the key character or the key word from a character string image to be recognized; and

recognizing individual character images in an image of a character string to identify a word for each area delimited by each key character or key word in the character string image to be recognized.

24. (currently amended) A storage medium storing a program recognizing a character string image, said program controlling a processor to perform a method comprising the ~~processes of:~~

automatically extracting a code string of a key word which is a node of a character string from a character string category to be recognized and expressed as a character code;

separating an image of the character string into images of individual characters;

recognizing the individual character images;

extracting the extracted key word or a part of the key word from a character string image; and

holistically recognizing character strings in partial areas determined by the extracted key words.

a key word extraction unit separating an image of the character string into images of individual characters, recognizing the individual character images and extracting a-as key word

~~extracted by said key characters, a string of characters corresponding to the code string of the~~
key word;

~~a partial area extraction unit or extracting a partial area falling between extracted of the~~
key words is extracted from a the image of the character string image; and

~~a recognition unit holistically recognizing a character strings-string in the partial~~
areas determined by the extracted key words by said partial area extraction unit.

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12. Claims 12-14, 18 and 19 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Murray et al., hereinafter Murray, (U.S. Patent 6,539,118) in view of Mao et al., hereinafter Mao, (U.S. Patent 6,327,386).

Regarding Claim 12, arguments analogous to those presented for Claim 1 are applicable to claim 12 concerning holistically recognizing and verification of the word area.

Murray does not explicitly disclose further limitations recited in this claim.

Mao, in the same field of endeavor, discloses a key character extraction system, wherein:

said recognition unit holistically recognizes word area based on a word feature generated by combining character features;

said verification unit computes a division position of each character in a word matching template, compares line density of a word image obtained at each division position with line density held by each character a recognized word, and rejects a word recognition result when a sum of the line density, or difference in a collation ratio is larger than a threshold (Figures 5-9; Column 8, Lines 34-67, Column 9, Column 10, Lines 1-25).

Regarding claim 13, Mao further discloses said verification computes a division position of each character in a word image from a matching template, compares peripheral distribution of a word image obtained at each division position with peripheral distribution held by each character of a recognized word, and rejects word recognition result when sum of the peripheral distribution, or a difference in a collation ratio is larger.